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STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE: EMERGENCY INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR PEACE, NORMALCY AND RECONSTRUCTION OF WAR-STRICKEN AFGHANISTAN

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Special Mission and the political situation: developments from mid-September to November 1995

1. At my instruction, the Head of the Special Mission to Afghanistan, Ambassador Mahmoud Mestiri, arrived in Islamabad on 16 September 1995 to resume United Nations peacemaking efforts in Afghanistan. On the way there, he represented me at the meeting/seminar convened at Tashkent by the Government of Uzbekistan on the issues of security and cooperation in Central Asia. At that event, the Head of the Special Mission was received by the President of Uzbekistan, Mr. Islam Karimov, and met the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan and other officials to discuss the situation in Afghanistan.

2. When the Head of the Special Mission arrived in the region, much of Afghanistan was embroiled in fierce fighting, especially in and around Kabul. The Taliban, who were at this time in control of more than half the country, had moved close to Kabul in an apparent bid to remove President Burhanuddin Rabbani from power by force, to take over the capital and to establish an Islamic government. Mr. Rabbani and his commander, Ahmad Shah Masood, who controlled Kabul and five other provinces in the north-eastern part of the country, were evidently determined to defend Kabul at all cost.

3. The leader of the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan (NIMA), General Rashid Dostum, and his allies in the Supreme Coordination Council, controlled the provinces in the north of Afghanistan, and were prepared to

defend them against either the Rabbani or Taliban forces. Sporadic fighting continued in and around the Salang highway between the Dostum and Rabbani forces, following the collapse of an unannounced cease-fire between them. Fighting also continued in Bamyan in the central region between the rival factions of the Hezb-e-Wahdat. The three provinces of Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar in eastern Afghanistan, under the leadership of Governor Hajji Abdul Qadir, remained relatively calm and neutral in these conflicts.

4. In short, the general atmosphere in Afghanistan was that of war and preparation for war. The erstwhile rivalry, sometimes violent, that had existed among the nine political parties formed during the struggle against the Soviet-backed Government, appeared to have changed into a conflict among three major armed groups: the Taliban, the forces controlled by General Dostum and his allies in the Supreme Coordination Council, and the government forces of President Rabbani. The country seemed to be heading for a major and bloody contest among these forces for the control of Kabul. The Head of the Special Mission was determined to do his utmost to prevent such a contest, with all the bloodshed and misery it would entail.

5. This tense situation was exacerbated by a reported increase in external interference in support of one or the other of the armed factions, through the direct or indirect supply of weapons, ammunition and other forms of military assistance. This manner of foreign intervention in Afghanistan has persistently complicated efforts to restore peaceful conditions there and the General Assembly and Security Council have rightly called upon all States to desist from it.

6. In these unpromising circumstances, I instructed the Head of the Special Mission to pursue the following objectives:

(a) To seek agreement between the major warring factions for a limited cease-fire of about 10 days, with each party maintaining its position and territory occupied at the cease-fire time. Agreement on this limited cease-fire should be followed immediately by serious negotiations among the concerned parties for the transfer of power by President Rabbani in Kabul;

(b) To negotiate the establishment of a forum or mechanism representing the warring parties and others to which power would be transferred, whereupon a long-term nationwide cease-fire would come into force, possibly supervised by international monitors. The mechanism would then deal with the issues of an interim Government, security and a neutral force for, and demilitarization of, Kabul. These would be the first steps towards political normalization.

7. In pursuit of these goals, the Head of the Special Mission shuttled repeatedly between various cities in Afghanistan for meetings with President Rabbani and his commander, Ahmad Shah Masood; General Rashid Dostum; the Taliban Shura; the leader of the Hezb-e-Islami, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; Governor Hajji Qadir and members of his Eastern Zone Shura; the leader of the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA), Pir Sayed Ahmed Gailani; the representative of the Hezb-e-Wahdat, Mr. Taleb; the leader of the Harakat-e-Islami, Ayatollah Assef Mohseini; and other prominent Afghan personalities and organizations.

8. The Head of the Special Mission also travelled to Tehran on 27 and 28 September 1995, at the invitation of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and held a meeting with the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Allauddin Boroujerdi, and his advisors on the conflict in Afghanistan and how the Islamic Republic of Iran could assist the United Nations peace process. The Deputy Minister pledged his Government's full support for the United Nations peace efforts; he hoped also that the necessary assistance would be provided by the United Nations and the international community to the Afghan refugees, especially those residing in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

9. Several meetings were also held with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, Sardar Aseff Ahmad Ali, and other government officials, the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Mr. Al-Ghabid, and his senior colleagues; a visiting Saudi official, Mr. Ahmed Badeeb; and the United States Assistant Secretary of State, Ms. Robin Raphel. The Special Mission, supported by the Office of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan, regularly briefed representatives of the permanent members of the Security Council and other interested Member States in Islamabad and Kabul.

10. Differences remain among the warring parties on the proposal for a limited cease-fire. President Rabbani expressed his willingness to accept an unconditional and nationwide cease-fire to permit talks on the transfer of power. His opponents, General Dostum and especially the Taliban, insisted that Mr. Rabbani should step down from power before they agreed to the cease-fire and negotiations on the transfer of power. The compromise proposal that negotiations on the cease-fire and the transfer of power should be pursued concurrently was also not acceptable to all the parties.

11. The Taliban in particular seemed to believe that a military takeover of Kabul was possible and was within their grasp and that a cease-fire would simply provide a respite to Mr. Rabbani, enabling him to regain his military strength. The representatives of the Taliban and the Supreme Coordination Council were engaged in protracted negotiations on the possible formation of political and military commissions for the final assault on Kabul. Under these circumstances, the Head of the Special Mission was unable to secure agreement among the parties to the proposal for a limited cease-fire.

12. The general view of the Afghan people remains that, his mandate having expired on 28 December 1994, Mr. Rabbani must transfer power to a broad-based representative body. While the forces opposed to Rabbani wished to see him removed by force, I was convinced that the transfer of power should be achieved through peaceful negotiations in accordance with the principles of the United Nations. To this end, the Head of the Special Mission travelled several times to Kabul, often in dangerous circumstances, to persuade Mr. Rabbani to relinquish power peacefully, if only to avoid the risk of a major confrontation in Kabul and spare its population from further destruction and bloodshed.

13. In two crucial meetings held in Kabul on 21 and 22 October, Mr. Rabbani expressed to the Head of the Special Mission his willingness to transfer power, not to his "enemies", but to a mechanism comprising representatives of the warring parties, including his own, as soon as such a body could be agreed upon and constituted. He insisted on the declaration of a cease-fire, however

limited, to allow for this arrangement to take place, and on the need to curb foreign interference in Afghanistan, especially by outside forces who were bent on removing him. The Head of the Special Mission urged Mr. Rabbani to declare publicly his willingness to relinquish power to an agreed mechanism, and to give assurances to his opponents, who were sceptical of his real intentions to step down. He agreed to make such a public declaration. He also said that he would provide the Head of the Special Mission with a list of names of Afghan personalities whom he recommended for membership of the transfer-of-power mechanism. Some names emerged informally at this meeting. It was also understood that the leader or head of the mechanism, who would be the recipient of power from Mr. Rabbani, should be chosen at a later stage. Mr. Rabbani also referred to his own peace initiatives, which he said would be undertaken concurrently with those of the United Nations.

14. On 6 November, Mr. Rabbani announced publicly his willingness to transfer power to an individual or commission and proposed that the warring parties and other neutral personalities should sit together, under United Nations mediation, to agree on a suitable mechanism and the date for the transfer of power. As a precondition, however, Mr. Rabbani called for the cessation of all hostilities and for an end to all forms of foreign interference.

15. Two days later, on 8 November, the Head of the Special Mission travelled to Kabul to discuss these points with Mr. Rabbani and to obtain the list of names he recommended for membership of the mechanism. The President reiterated the main elements of his declaration but, regarding the names, said he was awaiting the outcome of a meeting that was currently under way in Kandahar between the Taliban and representatives of the leaders of the Hezb-e-Islami, Younis Khalis, and of the Harakat-e-Inqilabi-Islami, Nabi Mohammadi. He said that these talks were going well and that he expected that his representatives would shortly be invited to Kandahar to join the talks, which were centred on the membership of the transfer-of-power mechanism. He agreed with the Head of the Special Mission that there should be a minimum time-lag between the declaration of a cease-fire and the actual transfer of power, and that a suitable arrangement should be agreed among the parties for the security of Kabul.

16. Following this meeting, the Head of the Special Mission met in Mazar-i-Sharif on 11 November with General Dostum, who characterized Mr. Rabbani's declaration of 6 November as yet another ruse to gain time and cling to power. He too expressed great concern at the increasing pace of outside interference in Afghanistan. He felt that no meaningful reconciliation between Mr. Rabbani and the forces opposed to him was feasible and feared that a major battle for the control of Kabul was inevitable. He also wondered whether the formation of a parallel interim Government, comprising the Taliban, the members of the Supreme Coordination Council and others, and based in Jalalabad, might not be a way out of the current impasse. He repeated his full support for the United Nations' peace efforts, while maintaining his own contacts with the Taliban.

17. The members of the Taliban Shura who met with the Head of the Special Mission also expressed serious doubts about Mr. Rabbani's intention to relinquish power and expressed their conviction that the only way to effect the transfer of power was by military means.

18. The Head of the Special Mission returned to Kabul on 14 November for a further meeting with Mr. Rabbani. At this meeting, the latter submitted names, representing all the provinces of Afghanistan, which had been previously discussed with the Head of the Special Mission. In his view, the names reflected a regional, ethnic, religious and political balance and he asked that they be considered by the other parties. The Head of the Special Mission accepted the names on the clear understanding that the list was not a final one but would be subject to amendment by the other parties, until an agreed and definitive list could be established.

19. The Head of the Special Mission immediately submitted these names to General Dostum and, through him, to the other members of the Supreme Coordination Council and, two days later, to the Taliban in Kandahar. The Taliban assured the Head of the Special Mission that the list would be considered by their full Shura, whose formal reaction would be made available to him shortly. The list was also forwarded to Governor Hajji Qadir for consideration by the members of the Eastern Zone Shura. The Governor's initial response was positive and he said he would refer the list to his area's Shura for a formal consideration and response.

20. On 19 November, the Head of the Special Mission travelled to Shebargan for a meeting with General Dostum, who welcomed this list of names as a reasonable basis for negotiations and encouraged the Head of the Special Mission to continue with his consultations. The General himself submitted 10 names that he wished to see included. He said that he would personally endorse a final list that was acceptable to the United Nations, whose peace efforts in Afghanistan he supported fully.

21. In a meeting with the leader of the Harakat-e-Islami, Ayatollah Assef Mohseini, the Head of the Special Mission was given several additional names. Ayatollah Mohseini observed that the Afghan Shi'ite community, which in his view constituted some 25 per cent of the country's population, needed to be equitably represented in the mechanism. He recommended that neutral and independent Afghans should form the majority of the mechanism. This would reduce the often divisive role of the parties and provide a needed stability to the peace process.

22. The Head of the Special Mission planned to travel to Kabul on 23 November for a meeting with Mr. Rabbani to consider the names given to him by General Dostum and Ayatollah Mohseini. The formal response from the Taliban was then expected. However, the visit could not take place because of renewed hostilities in and around Kabul and consequent insecurity in the area.

23. At my request, the Head of the Special Mission departed Islamabad on 26 November to report to me in New York on this latest phase of the peace process. At the time of his departure, intense fighting, involving often indiscriminate rocketing and aerial bombardment, was going on in and around Kabul between the Taliban and government forces.

24. I have been asked to provide the Special Mission's good offices to secure the release of seven Russian crew members of an aircraft forced down by the Taliban, who have been detained in Kandahar since August 1995. I accordingly

instructed my Office in Afghanistan, in conjunction with OIC, to undertake efforts, on humanitarian grounds, to facilitate negotiations for the early release of these captives. To my regret, these negotiations have yet to succeed. I appeal for the release of any and all non-combatants who may be in detention.

25. Afghanistan is now at a critical crossroads: either to follow the route to peace through dialogue and negotiations in a spirit of give-and-take, and with the assistance of the United Nations and the cooperation of the neighbouring and other interested countries; or to follow the route of continued war and confrontation where today's victor may be tomorrow's vanquished. Unfortunately, the current leaders of the principal factions seem to favour the latter route, notwithstanding the evident longing of their people for an end to almost two decades of strife.

26. I nevertheless continue to believe that peace and stability in Afghanistan are attainable, and that the United Nations should not falter at this juncture. The international community should not lose interest in Afghanistan nor become accustomed to the country's plight. On the contrary, it should be prepared to assist, in every way possible, this founding member of the Organization to know peace again.